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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENNA 003974

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR AND EB

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SUBJECT: RUSSIA-UKRAINE GAS NEGOTIATIONS: AUSTRIAN RESPONSE

REF: STATE 229253

Classified By: ECONOMIC-POLITICAL COUNSELOR GREGORY E. PHILLIPS
REASONS: 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) Embassy Vienna delivered reftel demarche to Austrian MFA Acting A/S-equivalent for Economic Relations with Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe Elisabeth Kornfeind and Director for Energy Policy Gisela Polte on December 29. Kornfeind and Polte confirmed that the GoA was following developments in the Russia-Ukraine gas contract negotiations closely. (Note: the Austrian press has prominently featured articles speculating on the possible consequences of an interruption of supplies for the Austrian and other EU member state gas markets. End note.) They noted that the Austrian energy company OMV had stocks on hand to last through at least "two cold winter months," but that other EU nations were perhaps not as well secured.

2. (C) Kornfeind thought it unlikely that Russia would go so far as to halt the flow of gas through the pipeline, since this would disrupt Russia's relationship with important customers to the west of Ukraine as well. While Austria was monitoring the situation closely, it remained, essentially a bilateral problem for the two countries to resolve. We observed that if the situation worsened after the beginning of the year, Austria might be called on as the EU Presidency to encourage the two sides to come together.

3. (C) Kornfeind and Polte agreed emphatically that Europe needed to diversify away from its dependence on Russia for gas supplies and noted that Austria would seek to develop an new EU energy strategy during its Presidency. They added that Austria hoped the Energy Community Treaty for Southeast Europe would enter into force within the next few months.
KILNER